

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

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Support H.B. 5204 – AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee, my name is Christie Stewart. I am the Chief Initiative Officer for the Center for Housing Opportunity based in Bridgeport, and I lead its collaborative work to regionally facilitate the preservation, production, and protection of housing that is affordable and accessible for people at all income levels and all stages of life in Fairfield and Litchfield Counties.

I thank for you the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of House Bill 5204 which would build upon extensive national, statewide, and local research and data to determine specific need for affordable housing throughout CT, allocate each region's housing needs across all of its towns using national best practice methodologies, empower towns to develop and implement housing plans that make sense for their communities, AND establish data driven housing targets and goals against which municipal and statewide leaders in CT can be held accountable.

HB 5204 will provide the transparency and accountability to counter the continued concentration of poor populations in CT's urban centers which data make clear is exacerbating regional economic and residential segregation, hampering regional economic growth, and creating negative regional spillovers in health, education, economic development, and employment.

CT must proactively meet the housing needs of all its residents and cannot continue to abdicate the bulk of this responsibility to the private sector by relying on tax credit programs and developer driven housing production to address what has become a critical shortage of 86,000 affordable homes for low-income households. H.B. 5204 offers a data driven framework to establish housing production and preservation targets throughout our state that will ensure housing opportunity exists in every CT community. It is a bold policy solution put forward at a critical moment in our state and the nation as we come to terms with a growing housing affordability crisis that will not be eradicated with status quo policy.

Local zoning and land use restrictions are preventing the creation of market-rate, affordable housing at the scale required to meet identified demand in CT. Without a regional planning and implementation framework supported and guided by the state, CT will continue to fail in its efforts to adequately address the housing needs of its low-moderate income residents, those who enable local economic activity but are historically and increasingly unable to live in the communities where they work. Local communities must evaluate their housing options in the context of the larger regional ecosystems that drive housing markets. And the state must lead this effort to ensure housing equity.

I urge you to pass HB 5204 and to begin to mitigate the unsustainable housing cost burdens placed on hundreds of thousands of low-moderate income households in our state who continue to be denied equitable access to housing opportunity in most of our communities and who disproportionately bare the largest share of CT's astounding 52% renter housing cost burden. We need policy and leadership that is up to the herculean task of preserving and producing housing at a rate that makes up for decades of under producing homes. The status quo is grossly inadequate.

Let 2022 be the year when the CT legislature stops ignoring the well documented need for multiple housing options in every town and city, and instead, takes the critical steps outlined in this bill to ensure all CT communities offer BOTH quality of life AND housing opportunity for everyone who lives, works, and plays there every day.

Thank you for considering my testimony.